Many of us go through hardships without anyone around us noticing. This is a good and a bad thing. Good, because it is part of living in a professional world. Bad, because many of us ignore the need to focus on our mental health until it is too late, which then could lead to a full breakdown, quitting work, or committing suicide. Bad also because we may be on our own, with our family and closest friends far away and our professional life being our only point of contact with others. When you come to work with a broken leg, you will get a lot of support and people are keen to help you: you won’t hear anyone say “just keep walking, it will get better someday”. But when it comes to mental health, people still experience a lot of insecurity about how to deal with this (for themselves or with others).

We are tuned into a society that stigmatizes mental health challenges. This stigma makes us say, as much to others as to ourselves, to “just keep going and it will go away someday”. This mindset is unhealthy and destructive. To break down the stigma associated with mental health, we decided to integrate mental health issues into our newsletter. We hope to have discussions around mental health and offer resources and information about topics such as exhaustion, anxiety, or lack of focus, and to provide contact information for professionals who will help you tackle the problem at its roots.

We intend for this to be a regular column in the PGA Post, and invite feedback at dfci_pgapost@dfci.harvard.edu if you have topics you would like to see addressed in a future issue. For this issue, we will focus on anxiety, a major challenge faced by graduate students and postdocs. Below, we have attached a sample of screening questions used by psychologists that work with HMS and BU postdocs to help identify anxiety issues. Thinking about how these questions apply to your (cont. on pg. 3)
Finding the right lab to start a postdoc position can be an intimidating and challenging process. It is highly unlikely that your new workplace will fulfill all your professional and personal expectations, making it imperative that you conduct an interview that enables you to grasp the essentials of your new position. Here are a few suggestions to make the search less troublesome!

**The project**

There is a reason why you are applying to a given lab for a postdoctoral position, and it most likely relates to the research that they are doing. Many labs have outdated websites and present a limited number of projects in conferences and other public platforms. It is therefore vital that you make sure you get a comprehensive idea of the research conducted in the lab.

- Which project would I work with if I joined the lab?
- Will I have one main project or divide my workload across several projects?
- Will I be able to develop my own line of research within the lab’s general scientific scope?
- Will I have support from a research assistant or any other lab member during the course of the project(s)?

**Mentoring**

Postdoctoral positions were created to train scientists to become independent and gather the experience necessary to eventually establish their own labs. That said, a postdoc is still considered a training position. It is therefore critical that your mentoring expectations align with those of your group leader’s. Here are some questions you may consider asking at your interview.

- How accessible are you to lab members? Are there any lab meetings, and how often are they?
- What is your style of supervision? To what degree can I work independently in the lab?
- Are postdocs encouraged to present their research at conferences, seminars and smaller meetings?
- For how long would you expect my postdoctoral training to last?
- How are projects in your lab conceived and assigned?
- How does the lab handle collaborations with other research groups?
- How are grants and manuscripts written?

**Work environment**

“Could I talk to other members of the lab?” This question is mandatory during a postdoc interview! Conversing with your potential new colleagues will give you a better idea about what life looks like for other postdocs in the lab and shed light on the successes and challenges each of them faces. If you are unable to meet with other members of the lab, consider asking these questions to your group leader instead.

- What’s the average duration a postdoc stays in the lab?
- Which kind positions—academic or industry—do postdocs typically apply for and get after leaving the lab?
- How is work/life balance perceived and handled by the group leader and by other lab members?
- Is the lab environment collaborative or competitive?
- What is your favorite and least favorite aspect of the lab?
- Do lab members engage in social activities?
- How are conflicts resolved within the group/with collaborators?

**Financials**

The conditions under which a lab will accept a new postdoc depend greatly on the research group’s financial situation. Many labs will require that all new postdocs secure funding within their first year of employment, if not prior to formally joining the research group.

We hope this list of questions will cover different aspects of your potential new postdoc position and provide some hints on how you will grow and distinguish yourself from other postdocs when you move forward with your career. Best of luck on your postdoc interview!
life should give you some idea about whether anxiety is a topic to which you should give some attention. For a more complete assessment, you can access the same test through KGA online (https://my.kgalifeservices.com/screenings/anxiety/?org_code=dfci).

If a webinar about strategies to deal with anxiety is more your speed, they also offer a video that could be worthwhile and helpful to watch: https://my.kgalifeservices.com/categories/emotional-health/subcategories/anxiety/la_webinars/minimizing-worry-to-maximize-your-life.

On the other hand, if you are in immediate need or are just thinking about accessing professional help, the DFCI KGA Employee Assistance Program provides confidential 24/7 access to a network of experts, free of charge, at 800-648-9557 or info@kgreer.com.

The DFCI PGA is thrilled to announce the launch of our very own PGA Teams channel for all DFCI graduate students and postdocs. This is a central space online for all of us research trainees at DFCI to connect with each other and share experimental support, protocols, laughs, and events. Here are three reasons you should check out the PGA Teams for yourself:

1. You can easily share protocols, reagents, and equipment!

Our readers in Cancer Immunology and Virology are probably familiar with the department’s very helpful WhatsApp channel for requesting help on new protocols or emergency late-night reagents. If other departments have a similar setup, I’m sure they will attest to their usefulness. We’ve taken this idea and expanded it to all DFCI postdocs and graduate students through PGA Teams. Now you can post your requests for help, reagents, and equipment and reach the entire institute, making it more likely you’ll get the answers you need.

2. You can contact the PGA directly.

If you’re looking to get more involved in graduate student/postdoc life at DFCI, you should know that the entire PGA is active on our Team space (we made it, after all!). Whether you want to join the PGA or one of its committees, or just want to ask about the next social event we have planned, firing off a message on Teams is probably the fastest way to reach us now.

3. You can connect with other trainees, despite COVID distancing.

Even though vaccination rates are soaring and things are starting to look up, we are still a ways away from being able to have in-person lunches, meetings, and social gatherings. Our Team was launched to generate a space where graduate students and postdocs can mingle and support one another virtually, until such a time as we can gather in person again. It’s not quite the same thing, but we have already had a Virtual Games Night and a virtual museum tour. So if you are feeling disconnected from life at DFCI, give it a try!

Anyone on the PGA mailing list should have already been added to the PGA Teams, but if you haven’t been, you can access it by following this link.
Congratulations to our recent DFCI Fellowship Awardees!

Tyler Beyett, PhD
Department & Lab: Cancer Biology - Eck
Award: National Cancer Institute/NIH/DHHS, F32: NRSA

Nicoletta Cieri, MD, PhD
Department & Lab: Medical Oncology - Wu
Award: American Association for Cancer Research

Jevon Cutler, PhD
Department & Lab: Pediatric Oncology - Armstrong
Award: National Cancer Institute/NIH/DHHS, F32: NRSA

Saumya Gupta, PhD
Department & Lab: Cancer Biology - Gimelbrant
Award: Chron's & Colitis Foundation

Yihang Li, PhD
Department & Lab: Cancer Biology - Segal
Award: DOD: Lefler Fellowship

Li Qiang, PhD
Department & Lab: Cancer Immunology & Virology – Dougan
Award: Society for Immunotherapy of Cancer (SITC) Bristol-Myers Squibb

Satyaki Sengupta, PhD
Department & Lab: Pediatric Oncology – George
Award: A Collaborative Pediatric Cancer Research Awards Program

Hannah Uckelmann, PhD
Department & Lab: Pediatric Oncology - Armstrong
Award: The Mark Foundation for Cancer Research

Di Zhang, PhD
Department & Lab: Cancer Immunology & Virology - Wu
Award: National Cancer Institute/NIH/DHHS K00: NCI Predoctoral to Postdoctoral Fellow Transition Award

If you have won an award, please let us know – we would love to acknowledge your success. Send to sonal_jhaveri@dfci.harvard.edu your Name, Department, Name of your PI and Name of the Organization that has awarded you the Fellowship.

Thanks

Curing Cancer Comics is brought to you by a former DFCI Postdoc!